Loving Tribute

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Loving Tribute

by jonnimir

Summary

Will was, in a word, *awestruck* by the Ripper.

Notes

So new Hannigram Kinkmeme convinced me to start Kinkterror, and I'll theoretically be doing one fic for each themed week, combining various prompts from each. This one's for slasher week, and runs with gore + snuff (but no MCD here). There was no way I was going to get this fic 100% finished this week, but I was eager to share and I even did art for it, so here's 50%!

This one also fills a Kinkmeme prompt (snipped for spoilers): "There's another Ripper murder, and the newest victim looks scarily like Will Graham. It isn't though. Will finds himself aroused at what he recognizes as a worshipful effigy, and he can feel the admiration and love put into it."

I was lazy about setting up the context, but it's a vaguely s1 AU: Will doesn't have encephalitis, has fewer moral reservations, and is hornier for the Ripper.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Will's reluctance to have a psychiatric evaluation done, at Jack Crawford's insistence, was due to more than a general dislike of psychiatrists. He accepted Hannibal's rubber-stamped assessment of him as "more or less sane" with both relief and suspicion, and began their less-than-official conversations with no small degree of caution. He didn't want anyone else to know what went on in his mind.

He had his hesitations about going back in the field again, but not for the reasons that seemed to concern Jack or Alana. His forensics studies had acclimated him to both the sight and smell of blood, death, and decay, and even the messiest scenes capable of bothering other experienced agents didn't turn his stomach. And using his empathic insights to recreate the crimes wasn't entirely horrifying, either.

What it did bring him, on occasion, was a disorienting sense of pleasure.

Not all of the crimes. Sometimes they were fueled by hate and rage, stale and banal things that were annoyingly predictable in their mélange of anger and insecurity, and they would bring him nothing more than a cheap shot of adrenaline and a lingering distaste. But sometimes they were creative, carried out by a more interesting mind, and came with desire and sick satisfaction and an addicting rush of power, and they would make him bite his lip to maintain a neutral expression, and would follow him home and into dreams that were uncomfortably pleasurable.

Each crime scene brought different emotions and images, different sensations ghosting along his limbs. But the kills that always stuck with him the longest were from the Chesapeake Ripper.

It had been a good few months since the most recent Ripper kill, but when Will started working with Jack he was given the file to review all the same, in case he had any new insights. He gave Jack some weak, generic sort of terms to describe him: a sadist, an intelligent psychopath, a professional with surgical knowledge, likely affluent and charming, a perfectionist, nearly impossible to catch. Things that Jack must already know.

He kept to himself the more colorful images and sensations that came with these terms.

The Ripper drew pain from his victims with excruciating precision, metabolizing it as power, pleasure. Each scream a burst of color, each cut satisfaction. Wringing out every ounce of agony to feed his inner beast. His synapses clicked along quickly, efficiently, frighteningly fast. He was sharp with experience and armed with the steady, experienced hands of a surgeon. He was a master of his craft and an apex predator. Strong-bodied, well-spoken.

Will imagined what exquisite noises he would draw from his victims. What vaulted screams and ragged gasps, how sharply they would twist and beg for death. And the Ripper, detached and dispassionate, would deny them, like a judge passing his sentence. They were unworthy of the full strength of his attention, yet he would give it to them, and he would give them even more than they deserved in death when he elevated the simple swine into works of art.

Will was, in a word, *awestruck* by the Ripper. Will knew that when he next struck, the discomfort of having to hide his true reactions would be worth it for the honor of seeing one of his scenes in the flesh.

So when he received a call from Jack at midnight, a few months after they starting working together, saying they had a fresh scene that might be the Ripper and they wanted his eyes on it ASAP, Will didn't even grouch about the late-night call. He just got dressed and out the door as quick as he could, hands nearly shaking from the sudden adrenaline coursing through him.

When he arrived at the location, a small arts museum in Baltimore, he made sure to hide his enthusiasm under a façade of nervous reluctance. Pushing his glasses up on his nose and leaving his eyes cast low, swallowing his excitement as if it was a ball of nerves. He didn't make eye contact with Jack when he appeared, gaze gliding off to the side.

Instead, his eyes landed on Beverly, who had donned her FBI jacket and was carrying a camera, talking to one of the other crime scene techs. The scene must be somewhere inside the building, because only a few people were lingering out here, not enough for the full investigation team. She stopped when she saw Will and Jack approaching him, and frowned.

"Jack!" she called. "We told you we'd take care of this one ourselves. He shouldn't be here."

"We need him on this," Jack said firmly. "He knows the Ripper better than anyone besides myself, and I trust his judgment. Even under the circumstances."

Will's eyebrows drew together. "What circumstances would those be, Jack?"

Jack sighed loudly. His hands thrust into his pockets and he hunched against a cold breeze. "It could be a coincidence. We don't have any evidence confirming, and I'll need you to take a look before we decide for sure. But it looks like this one's personal, Will."

"Personal how?" He hoped his voice sounded apprehensive and irritated rather than taut with anticipation.

"There's a resemblance," Jack said gruffly. "You'll see. Follow me."

Beverly threw up her hands as Jack led him past her to the front doors. "Jack, I really don't think—"

"Did I ask what you think?" Jack interjected. "Or did I tell you to do your job? Because that's what I'm doing, I'm doing my job. And my job is to get the best analyst we have on the scene. Now get those photos into the system and start combing this place for evidence."

"Won't be any, if it's the Ripper. We'll just have a hundred bits of random visitors."

"Then catalog the hundred visitors. Maybe if he thinks it's a needle in a haystack, he'll get sloppy for once. You hear?"

Beverly nodded shortly, jaw clenched. “Got it.” Her eyes flicked back to Will, and she shook her head resignedly. “Will, be careful in there, alright?”

“Good. Will?” He jerked his head toward the door, and Will followed. “We don’t know much yet. Security guard found him about four hours ago. Our team’s still fresh on the scene. Glad it caught someone’s attention and came to me right away.”

They walked through the foyer and up to a set of double doors that was propped open. Will caught a glimpse of a courtyard lit up with floodlights before Jack stopped him.

“I need to know you have your head in the game for this one. Can I count on you to stay solid?”

“I’m here, aren’t I?”

That must have been good enough for Jack. He turned and walked through into the courtyard, and Will followed him.

If he hadn’t been on the lookout for a body, his first glance would have made him assume that what was in the courtyard was some nude classical statue, posed in a niche with a spotlight on it that made some parts of flesh blindingly bright and others sunken into the dark. From a distance he might have assumed the dark streaks it wore were marks of age, water damage or lichen. But as he neared it, he saw what was incongruous: the curls of real hair, dark against pale skin; the way the streaks were strangely precise and gleamed damp and red where they caught the light; the bright crimson of roses that protruded from his guts; the fishhooks pulling at the skin that were posing the man as if he were a marionette on strings; all the details that made it clear this was not only human, but a work of art presented by the Ripper himself.

Will stopped not far from it, his heart pulsing in his throat. The waves of dark hair and unshaven scruff along his jaw, and the fishhooks, decorated with feather like Will’s own hand-crafted lures—it didn’t take much to know that this was him. A facsimile of him, crafted with extraordinary care.

“Is this a threat?” Jack asked after a moment of silence, with Will’s eyes taking in every detail.

He stopped himself from shaking his head automatically. No, this wasn’t a threat. This wasn’t vicious or threatening. Bloody and brutal, yes, but not anything so aggressive as a crude threat.

He swallowed. “I need to look. Alone. And turn off any lights that weren’t on when you got here.”

Jack took a moment after that pronouncement, and sighed again. He didn’t insult Will by asking if he was sure. Then he gestured to the crime scene techs who were milling around. “Everyone out.”

Will barely noticed them, anyway. The lights flickered out around him, until there were only a few small lights dotting the courtyard, including one angled directly at the body. He stepped closer and closer, until he had to lift his head up to see the top of this tableau—since the man, though on his knees, was raised onto a podium. Will's mouth was dry and he was aware of a shiver crawling over his skin that wouldn't quite cease. It was him. And it was *beautiful*.

It took him a moment longer than usual to collect himself and clear his mind to recreate the scene. It felt weirdly invasive to peek inside the Ripper's perspective of the scene when Will had so clearly been assigned a different role in it, but curiosity and need filled him, spilling over. He was hungry for it.

He closed his eyes, and the pendulum swung, trailing light behind his eyelids.

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The courtyard, empty. The man, stuffed inside an oversized suitcase, sedated only enough to keep him quiet for his arrival.

Will was still in twilight as he gathered the lures he had prepared and speared them neatly through flesh, leaving small droplets of blood to gather at the tips.

He raised the man up to his knees, entirely bare and increasingly alert, and secured the lines to the inner arche of the alcove. When he was finished, he saw the man's eyes were open and watering.

"Don't bother trying to scream," Will said to him in an undertone. "I've injected you with localized paralytics, and your vocal cords and your limbs will be incapable of movement. You'll still be able to feel, however. Best to accept it now."

The man tried to scream anyway, a harsh rasp. His face was lit with panic, almost comically. Will's eyes narrowed. He had none of the dignity befitting the man this scene was in ode to—simply another pig with the misfortune of bearing some resemblance.

He ensured the positioning was right before he began, the fishing line the right length and spacing to evoke the classical work that had inspired his pose—St. Sebastian, bound and shot through with arrows. A martyr, a Catholic saint who through ironic happenstance became an icon of male beauty and homoeroticism.

Will used a scalpel to draw pinstripes over his skin, curving with great care and precision over the topography of his body. From his collarbones, over his shoulders, and down to his wrists. And then each narrow line severed from the flesh beneath, peeled up to reveal the deep pink of raw flesh beneath, before being rolled up tightly and carefully pinned at the collarbone, like a garland of roses. Blood quickly filled each trench of skin and dripped out into his palms. And then the same down from the iliac crest of his hips to his ankles. Painstakingly drawn in clean lines, then pulled up into whorls, a belt of ribbons. A loving tribute to the beauty of the man it was to honor.

The man's face was plastered with tears and stretched with silent screams as he was flayed alive. Will was aware of the quaking that racked his body, but paid far less attention than usual to the pain of this victim. His pain, specifically, was not the point. He was a tribute, with whom his executioner would take exquisite care. Only the very best would do for the one who truly interested him. Only the most beautiful presentation would suffice.

The death was long, for he would not allow himself to rush the incisions, and he did not sever major arteries. But there was enough blood loss by the time he finished the surface incisions and began cutting open the torso that the man was pale and still as death, if not yet quite there.

He split open the abdomen and bisected it into triangular sections. He threaded wire loops through the man's nipples and used them to draw up and secure each abdominal section. He didn't want the display to be entirely lewd, but it was appropriate that the overall effect have some degree of sexual undertones, enough to effectively convey that his interest was not simply platonic.

To further emphasize this point, he buried the stems of a small bouquet of roses in the man's intestines, with their thorns shorn to prevent causing unnecessary mess. He then took a batch of the rose briar's vines and twisted them around the neck, and down the torso, sweeping into

the opened abdomen and not quite pricking deep enough to bleed—all this to show the victim vulnerable in his jaws, yet with the romantic connotations of the rose still blooming bright. A monstrous love. He would both treasure and devour him, making sure not to crush too quickly the one he held in his grasp.

Finally, he cut a discreet incision along the man's spine and removed a kidney, which he quickly packed among the ice he brought along. He would savor the reminder of this display, though not as much as he would have if he were now consuming the one he truly treasured, rather than this pale imitation.

He adjusted a spotlight to catch precisely the right angle, so that the highlights would glow and emerge from the darkness as if a dramatic work of *chiaroscuro*, then stepped back to admire his display. It was, even with a substitute, a magnificent image. He pulsed with pride and desire—the resemblance was adequate for him to imagine his true love in its place, an exquisite offering to the gods who sculpted him from flesh, a tribute to all the glory within him. He longed to have him in such a way, to touch and mold and feel the shudders of his dying flesh, to feel him burn hot and then cool, to offer him worship in such an intensely personal way. But for now, this was the best he could do. He had to show his love how he felt, and trust in his brilliant mind to make the connections and understand how this gift was truly intended.

Worship, not wrath—this was his design.

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Will came back to himself with a gasp and a shudder that rolled through his spine, tightening in the small of his back and making him very grateful, momentarily, that he was alone in the courtyard and no one was there to see a response that was surely not horror or dismay.

It was a strange layering of perspectives—the Ripper's at the forefront, powerful in its all-consuming adoration; the experience of the victim who received these carefully cruel ministrations, who died at the hands of a transcendent being; and Will, knowing he was who the Ripper was truly fixated on, he was the focus of the Ripper's adorations, he was *blessed* with this tribute.

And as all of these perspectives collided inside him, the physical response his body had chosen above all else was—what?

A cold sweat, hammering pulse, dry mouth—as if fear.

A coil of *want*, of *hunger* in his guts, a heated flush that spread across his cheeks and neck, the blistering sensitivity at picturing the Ripper touching his skin to pose his body, and a throb between his legs at knowing those cruel, loving hands wanted to ferry him from life to death—not fear, he realized. Arousal.

He focused on breathing more slowly and purposefully and struggled to bring the flush down from his cheeks. His imaginings were always painfully vivid, but never so personal. The result was more than just a bitten lip and averted glance. It felt as though if he didn't get

himself under control right now, he would quake, be brought to his knees by the phantom touch of this killer.

So he focused on breathing and composing his speech to Jack, until Jack, presumably impatient and maybe even concerned given the circumstances, knocked on and immediately opened the courtyard door.

“You doing alright in here?”

Will nodded, eyes averted.

“Is it him?”

He nodded again, and rubbed the back of his neck. “And, uh. That’s meant to be me.”

“Why? Is he threatening you?”

“Simple threats would be a bit mundane for the Ripper. And this isn’t… anger. It’s not vindictive. He put too much effort into it for that.”

“What then?”

“It’s…” *A love letter*. “An expression of interest. He wants me to know he sees me; he sees what I do. And he respects it.”

Jack’s face was uncomprehending. “So he… killed someone to tell you, ‘good job?’”

Will wracked his brain for an explanation that would make sense to a normal person, and didn’t make it sound too much like the romantic overture that it was.

“Maybe it’s more of a challenge. If someone’s going to find him, he wants it to be me. He’ll engage with me in a way he wasn’t willing to engage with other agents.” Both things were technically true. Whatever had happened to Miriam Lass would have been practical, disposing of her in some way that was efficient or effective for his needs. What would happen to Will if he found him, in contrast, would be subject to less practical desires.

Jack frowned, but nodded. “We could use that. Killers get sloppy when they decide to play games.”

He wouldn’t, Will thought, but he nodded. But something familiar was tugging at the edge of his awareness.

“Can I let the techs back on scene, or do you need to take a closer look at anything first?”

Will looked at the tableau, his brow furrowed.

“Let them back. But send me all the pics as soon as you get them. Closeups especially.”

Jack nodded again. “And you’re sure you’re safe for now? Don’t need protective detail or anything?”

Will snorted. “I don’t think a tail would do anything more than annoy him. He’s smart, efficient. If he wanted to kill me, I’d be dead now. But yeah. For the immediate future, I should be… fine.”

He took one last look at the scene when Jack walked off to let people back in. He committed it to memory, placing it along with its pedestal in the center of his mind. Crime scene photos would never quite do it justice, and he couldn’t fully appreciate the work when he still had other’s eyes on him.

When Will drove home he struggled to focus on the road ahead of him instead of the vivid memory of the scene. His thoughts became more than simple repetition of the details—he couldn’t stop himself from imagining how it would feel to have the Ripper’s deft fingers cutting clean lines along his arms and legs and peeling up his skin in ribbons, murmuring something in a soft voice as Will moaned in pain. It should have been a horrifying thought, and it wasn’t comfortable, exactly, but it wasn’t without pleasure. The Ripper’s attention felt good, no matter what form it took. He imagined being half-suspended and paralyzed, helpless, posed naked like a doll for the Ripper’s pleasure—and it wasn’t long before he became as flushed as he had been at the crime scene, and too distracted for it to be wise for him to continue driving in the dark.

He pulled over on the side of the first road he came across that was empty and isolated. In the early hours of the morning, it wasn’t hard to find such a place. He bit his lip once he came to a stop, because this was intentional, and even without a witness he felt self-conscious about it—he couldn’t pretend he was doing anything else but exactly what he was doing.

Awkwardly, he shifted and tugged his pants down to his knees. He traced the lines the Ripper would cut up his thighs, and when he reached his hip his breath was coming fast and heavy.

He imagined the pinch of a needle through his nipples while he was already lightheaded from blood loss, the feeling of being so overloaded from agony that he floated through the pain.

He touched himself and imagined it was the Ripper who did so, indulging Will one last time as he bled out. He imagined the shine of his teeth, mouth open and hungering, knowing that mouth would be used to savor and consume his organs. The Ripper would smile, pleased at drawing such a reaction from Will, until he finally sank his hands into Will’s guts and pulled them out of his body with a horrific squelch.

He imagined the sight of his own cum dripping down onto the deep crimson mess of his spilled intestines, and then he came with a gasp and a whimper. Utterly breathless, he slouched in his seat and did his best to ignore the small but persistent corner of his brain that was aghast at what he’d just done.

The Ripper wouldn’t judge him for it. And at the moment, that was all he cared about.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

So I'm emerging from the void with the long-promised chapter 2/2, except now it's 2/4. Took me a while to stop being stubborn and realize the reason I couldn't write a satisfying finish was because it needed more space to breathe. And then I waited til I had a decent amount of ch. 3 written so I could hopefully avoid another lengthy absence.

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Warning for this chapter: technically self-injury (for horny reasons, with a fishhook)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will had his appointment with Hannibal early the next week. He knew as soon as he walked into the room that Hannibal had heard something about the Ripper case—the look on his face was too curious. And sure enough, it didn't take long for him to bring it up.

"Jack Crawford gave me a call over the weekend. He wanted me to speak with you regarding a new case that gave him some concern. He gave me some details, but I'd rather hear the account from you."

Will sighed and repressed the impulse to roll his eyes. Jack was relentless, but he was well-meaning. For any normal person, the sight of their doppelganger dead, mutilated, and disemboweled would be a disconcerting experience, and of course, Will couldn't come out and say why it wasn't, for him.

"If he gave you the basics, that's all you need to know. It was a Ripper scene made from someone who was meant to look like me. But it wasn't a threat. Not yet, anyway. It was more like curiosity."

"Curiosity can lead to dangerous things."

"So can police work. I'm not the fragile teacup Jack thinks I am, I've been around. Got stabbed when I was a cop, and that was supposed to be a routine investigation. I can't let it bother me."

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. "And yet Jack, who is by no means an inexperienced agent, seems most assuredly bothered."

"Because he already lost a trainee to the Ripper. He's scared he'll lose someone else."

"But you're not."

Will bit his lip. Skirting around an inconvenient truth was one thing, but Hannibal seemed to have a good instinct for when he was lying outright. “I guess you could say I’m curious about the Ripper’s curiosity.”

Hannibal nodded slowly, thoughtfully. “Are you curious why he chose you as the object of his attentions?”

He shrugged. “Among other things. I can speculate, at least. I’ve had some attention in the press lately from Freddie Lounds digging up stuff about my ‘dubious methods.’ She’s characterized me as nearly as dangerous as the killers I go after—I can see how that would intrigue him.”

“Freddie Lounds has a reputation for sensationalism. Do you think he would simply take her word for it?”

“He wouldn’t rely on her word alone. He’d have looked into me further, and it wouldn’t be hard to find there’s *speculation* about me in the psychiatric community. Regardless of the specifics, there are some implications.”

“Implications?”

“A perceived lack of stability, at the very least.”

“Do you share the perception of yourself as unstable?”

Will smiled slightly, but with grim humor. “We’ve had this conversation before, Dr. Lecter. Pushing for a new response to a question I’ve already answered could be seen as psychic driving.”

“You were the one who raised the topic this time. I’m just making sure you’re confident of your response.”

“Like I said, I think I’m about as stable as anyone could be who thinks about the things I do.”

“That’s a vague answer.”

“Stability is a vague concept,” he countered.

“Much of human psychology is a matter of relativity. That doesn’t mean it’s not worth assessing certain patterns of behavior.”

Will shrugged. “And I’m averse to being assessed. Which I think I made quite clear when Jack turned me over to you for exactly that kind of assessment.”

Hannibal pursed his lips. Will wondered if he was going to push further, but instead he said, “If this brings no personal revelations, does it at least have an impact on your profile of the Ripper?”

Will hesitated for a moment. “It’s more emotional than I’d given him credit for. Not that I thought he was emotionless before, but I hadn’t taken him for someone interested in forming

attachments to anyone."

Hannibal tilted his head. "'Emotional' is an interesting way of phrasing it. What emotions do you believe are in play here?"

Will shrugged, realizing too late that he couldn't easily pass off 'curiosity' as that emotion, and it was harder to navigate the real emotions present there without giving his own away. "I'm not sure even he knows for certain—this is new territory for him, and he's tentative. But I think he sees the potential for some kind of connection. He wants mutual understanding, and he's tired of being misunderstood by police and the press. He has an idea of how I think, and believes I can see who he really is. And that kind of understanding can be… emotionally intimate."

Despite this phrasing seeming perfectly valid for the situation, Will felt himself flushing slightly, because that wasn't the only kind of intimacy he had in mind.

"He wishes to build bridges to your mind, when you have spent so long closing it off to the outside world. How does that make you feel?"

"I feel…" *Exposed. Exhilarated. Terrified*. "I feel like I don't know my next step. Any attempt to communicate with him will be like flashing semaphore across a football field. It's hard to build connections like that in the first place, let alone respond to them. And… he's going to get frustrated with that, eventually. And I don't think anyone at the FBI wants to know what happens when the Ripper gets really frustrated."

"Would you prefer the alternative—a face-to-face conversation? Those who discover the Ripper in person don't seem to survive the encounter."

"I have no idea what I'd prefer," Will said with a harsh laugh. "If we do find him, I bet it'll be on his terms, anyway. Would you have a preference, if you were in my place?"

Hannibal's gaze floated to the side in thought. "I suppose both distance and proximity have their respective drawbacks. But distance seems to be a way to protect both parties involved, at least for the time being. Much like the concept of online dating, where the distance afforded by the internet provides a relative safe space for those involved to test the waters, before diving into an encounter in the real world."

Will raised his eyebrows and had to suppress a laugh at the unintentional accuracy of this comparison. "So that's your takeaway? It's like online dating via murder?"

Hannibal cracked a smile just wide enough to show his canines. "Perhaps not the ideal metaphor," he said. "But my point stands."

Will bit his lip. "I'm having a hard time imagining what would come after testing those metaphorical waters. Jack thinks if the Ripper's playing games, he might trip up and do something that could lead us to him. But that doesn't sound like him."

"No, from what you've told me, he sounds very careful."

“Careful at covering his tracks, at least, and he’s already used to playing risky with high-profile murders and taunting the authorities. I doubt he’s going to trip up now.”

“Would it help you to do a visualization exercise? A kind of thought experiment to get a clearer sense of what you anticipate the future will hold.”

But Will started shaking his head even before Hannibal had finished, and blurted “No” immediately. God, the last thing he needed right now was to have his psychiatrist see him pop a boner thinking about a serial killer.

He looked at his watch, and even though it wasn’t quite to the end of his session, said, “I should probably get going. I don’t want to waste any more of your time on this—like I said, I’m fine. We’ll just have to wait and see what happens with the Ripper.”

And brusque though it was, he gave his farewell, grabbed his jacket, and scurried out the door.

When he got back home, he found a full set of crime scene photos waiting in his inbox. He opened them immediately and began to zoom in on the details. Although the display didn’t have nearly the same magic in a flat plane as it had in person, it was still beautiful, and a treat to see all those details in brilliantly bright light and high definition. The neat pinwheels of flesh, the way the roses nestled into intestines, the way the hooks split and stretched the skin —

He frowned, looking at a close-up of one of the lures. He knew lures well. There was a lot of potential variation between knots and various components, and he had developed his own signature style over the years. And seeing these up close, he could tell that the Ripper had copied his style specifically. Which meant he had to have looked at Will’s lures in person—maybe even come into his house to inspect them, since it might have been difficult to see all the details through the window.

Will froze, and his eyes shot toward the open window, as if he might see the Ripper right there, staring at him. He felt his skin prickling. Had the Ripper been watching him? Had he… no, he couldn’t have seen Will in the state he was after the crime scene. The road had been completely empty, the night dark and stretching out around him. But if Will had made it all the way home before taking himself in hand, the Ripper could have been lurking somewhere, watching. The thought was thrilling, and he bit his lip, fighting against the trickle of arousal.

He took another look at the crime scene. He took a call from Jack, and confirmed that the lab techs had found no useful trace evidence at the scene, to no one’s surprise. He cooked up an uninspired stew for himself, and ate it while listening to some evening news that he paid little attention to.

What he did not do was close the curtains or turn the deadbolt, even as the evening turned to night and he could see nothing in the dark outside, nothing but the lights inside his house reflecting back at him. It was uncomfortable, the hairs at the back of his neck perpetually raised in that particular uneasy sense of being watched. The difference was that, unlike most

times he felt that sensation, this time it was warranted, to some degree. There was no particular reason the Ripper would need to spy on him from the bushes like a common peeping tom, but *maybe*. Maybe he was curious enough, maybe he was obsessed enough. Maybe this crime scene was a prelude, a courtesy card to let him know he was closing in. Maybe the Ripper would come for him tonight, now that he'd been seasoned with a bit of adrenaline.

His gut told him this wasn't the night, but he could ignore his gut. He could indulge a fantasy.

He took the unusual step of moving the dogs' beds upstairs and shepherding them into the empty master bedroom for the night. They whined a bit, but he didn't want them downstairs if the Ripper did come calling. They were friendly enough that they could probably be bribed to let a stranger into the house if he was just looking at the lures, but if the stranger attacked Will it would be a different matter, and he didn't want them to get hurt because they were trying to protect him.

He left the light on as he stripped to just his underwear, then he got into bed, the light still bright enough to obscure any shapes in the pure darkness outside.

There were two windows that would be good vantage points to see him on his bed. Laying down on the sheets, he could see one past his feet, but he did not turn his head to look out the side window.

He wished he had printed crime scene photos to spread before him, something that the Ripper could see. See that Will was thinking of him, and was not flinching or afraid. Though maybe he was afraid; it was hard to tell what was what in the tangle of sensations in his body.

He had an idea, and he sat up and walked over to the desk with his fishing lures before stopping to consider whether this was actually a good idea. He picked up a small clean hook, one that had already been strung with the kind of design from which the Ripper had drawn his inspiration.

He walked back to the bed, stripped off his underwear, the last pretense of modesty, and fell back on his bed, staring at the hook in his hand. He shivered.

I can see him. I want him to see me; it's only fair.

He palmed himself, still flaccid, because he had enough genuine apprehension in his bones right now to spoil it a bit.

He licked his lips. The Ripper might not actually be into his little peepshow act, he might find it *crude*. He might even be angry that Will was touching himself rather than the Ripper touching him, that Will was doing violence to his own body rather than leaving a blank, unspoilt canvas for him to mold into his art.

What was he even *doing*?

His self-reprimand was not effective in dissuading him. Thinking of the Ripper being angry was *definitely* not effective, and in fact seemed to simply propel him faster toward true

arousal. The Ripper was utterly controlled and calculating, and that was… honestly, hot enough in its own right. But the Ripper losing that cold, calm façade, unravelling, having his violence spill loose like a beast to leave Will gasping for air, bruised and torn more savagely than his usual victims…

"Fuck," he whispered out loud. One of his hands was working his growing erection, the other holding the hook by the lure and trembling slightly. He wasn't sure he could bring himself to use it, and he really, really *shouldn't*, especially without sanitizing the hook or his skin. It was terrible idea.

But still…

He ran the tip of it up his arm, just enough to feel the precarious drag of it across the surface of his skin as it threatened to pierce more deeply. Just enough to threaten, to tease. His teeth dug into his lower lip and he silently cursed, because whatever this was, it wasn't enough. But he could imagine, right? He could imagine the Ripper was out there watching him greedily. And it wasn't the act of masturbation that was the real prize here, no more than a cheap exhibitionistic thrill for Will—it was that fucking hook, damningly similar to the ones used to puncture his lookalike's skin and string him up. That's what felt like the real exposure here, because there'd be no mistaking that his response to the tableau was not *oh no* but rather *yes, please*. Would this please the Ripper? He hoped so; he realized a significant part of him wanted nothing more than to please him.

The Ripper's mindset was a welcome reprieve from the chaos of his mind, and Will dove into it, still stroking himself absentmindedly. It was a uniquely monstrous perspective, with the clinical precision befitting his crimes, but not an absence of emotion. And now among those emotions was *desire*.

He became so lost in the feeling that at first he was not aware of the hook piercing his skin; not until the pain of it broke through his hazy brain and his eyes flew open, just in time to see the tip of it poke up through the skin of his upper arm like a needle through bloodied cloth.

"Fuck!"

Then, bare seconds later, as he gave a little tug to it and saw how it distorted his flesh, and his cock twitched in response—"Oh *god*."

Zeroing in on the pain and the shine of blood on the hook tip, he thrust into his fist, well aware of the debauched sight he was presenting for anyone who might look through the window. He saw the Ripper's view with crystal clarity: the way his back arched as he thrust upward, the skin stretched on a hook to reenact his death tribute, and maybe, even through the glass, the pained noise as he came all over his fist.

The pain surged back after his moment of bliss, and he scrubbed a hand over his face with the arm that did not currently have a hook embedded in it. Sighing, he stood up to get his supplies so he could cut the barb off the damned thing before trying to remove it. It wasn't huge, but yanking it out would still tear up his flesh, and he wasn't about to test the limits of his masochism tonight when the Ripper wasn't even around to appreciate it.

He very pointedly did not consider how far he might go if the Ripper *was* around to appreciate it.

Chapter End Notes

I did question whether two masturbation scenes was too much for a relatively short fic, but I have my reasons. Plus I'm not sure it's possible to overstate Will's degree of thirst for the Ripper. :p

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There were no useful updates on the Ripper case the next day. Will spent hours poring over the details of the crime scene and viewing it side by side with past scenes, but didn't have any new insights. As usual, his in-person assessment of the scene seemed to be the most accurate, but it didn't stop him from trying to find something more. He had to dig through every discernable detail, unable to help himself when the object of his fantasies had left such a captivating gift.

It didn't help that the wound on his arm, now cleaned and bandaged, would still twinge if he put pressure on it, reminding him of the night before. It made him restless, almost impatient. How long would it take for the Ripper to decide he'd marinated long enough, and swoop in? And despite his fantasies, was that really what he wanted? A definitive ending, rather than an infinite courtship? He wanted to learn more about the Ripper, to have the chance to truly see him. And he could only do that if he was still alive.

By afternoon, he had finished an unsuccessful quest to find the painting that the Ripper had used as a reference for the pose, and started to question if in fact his instinct had been wrong, and it wasn't St. Sebastian after all.

He could probably try to consult an actual art historian about it if it seemed important, but he was reluctant to go so far as to make a social call for it unless he was sure it would help. On a whim, he ended up dialing Hannibal's number.

"Hello, Will," Hannibal said upon answering, with all of his characteristic warmth.

"Dr. Lecter. I was, uh… well, it's about the Ripper case, actually. I have photos from the crime scene. I think the Ripper was referencing a specific painting, maybe St. Sebastian, but I haven't been able to find it, so I might be off track. You seem to be well-versed in art history, so I was wondering if you might be able to help me identify it."

"I'm no expert, but I can certainly try my best. Why don't you bring the pictures to my office, and we can look over the scene together."

It was a long drive, but it wasn't like Will had any other plans.

When Will arrived and handed Hannibal a folder of images, he took his time reviewing them. Finally, he said, "I can see why this scene troubled Jack."

Will shrugged. "I've seen bloodier scenes from the Ripper before."

"But never before with such an intentional likeness."

He nodded shortly, not meeting Hannibal's eyes. "Does the pose look familiar to you?"

“His state of artful collapse does seem familiar, but I don’t recognize the artist offhand. However, the particular sense of drama in the pose makes me suspect it’s a Renaissance work at earliest. Possibly Baroque.”

“The lighting was deliberate, too. It doesn’t show up well in the photograph, but it was lit with strong contrast between the figure and the background. Bright highlights, thick shadows.”

Hannibal nodded. “Chiaroscuro. It would be consistent with the Baroque period. So perhaps composed by one of the Caravaggisti, who took after the eponymous Caravaggio.”

“Does that narrow it down much?”

“Somewhat. I have a book on Baroque art that I could consult, although it’s not exhaustive.”

“If it’s not too much trouble?”

“No trouble at all. I try to keep my shelves well-organized, so it shouldn’t take long to find.”

Will looked up at the sizable library while Hannibal ascended the ladder.

“Do you keep many books on art around here? I expected more psychiatric volumes.”

“Many are, and others contain patient records. But I like to keep a varied library here. I often have gaps between patients or cancelled appointments that leave me with some free time, but not enough to leave the office for long. And I find a well-rounded library to be one of my most prized possessions.”

Will nodded, strolling around the lower vestibule of his office. He came to a table with a set of drawings bearing Hannibal’s signature. He’d seen some before, in his restless wanderings around the office, but besides being idly impressed by the accuracy, he hadn’t given them much mind. These were life studies, curved backs and muscled arms, all with the same realism. He wondered if Hannibal’s education as a surgeon was useful when it came to rendering anatomy in art.

He heard the ladder creak as Hannibal returned, bearing a particularly heavy volume. He rested it on his desk and rolled up his sleeves, opening it to what looked like an appendix. Then he paused. “I noticed some details in the photos that you left out when you described the scene to me.”

“I wasn’t trying to give a full report on the specifics.”

“No, but you were describing its emotional impact. Its connotations, implications.”

“And?”

“And you neglected to mention the Ripper left you a bouquet of red roses.”

Right. Because if Will hadn’t already gotten the point from the sensuality and loving attention to detail, the romantic connotations of roses would have smacked him across the

face.

“He was offering a contrast. Blood red roses in the guts—beauty and horror. And attributing something of value to what’s inside me. Just like he had to peel back my skin to get to what’s beneath. He’s not interested in the face I present to the world, he’s interested in whatever he imagines is beneath.” It was the same excuse he’d given Jack when they’d last spoken.

“And nothing more than that?”

Will bit his lip. He would be lying if he said that was all, and Hannibal would know. “It’s hard to say what it meant to him, exactly. I’m still not sure he’s fully acquainted with whatever emotions he’s experiencing now.”

Hannibal frowned, and Will wondered if he sensed that he was holding something back.

“Do you disagree with my assessment?” Will asked. “I know you’re no stranger to criminal psychology, yourself, I’m sure you have your own interpretation.”

“The issue is not if I disagree with your assessment, but rather my thoughts on why you assess it as you do.” He flipped through a few pages of the oversized book, scanning the index, though Will knew he still had his full attention. “The contents of this book may well reveal an origin to the pose, but I’m not sure how much help that would be. I can’t help but wonder if your quest to identify the painting’s origin may be an attempt to avoid ruminating on the symbolism that is already identifiable.”

“I’ve been ruminating plenty.”

“But with how much success? You reduce the roses to little more than an aesthetic statement, yet in older traditions, the gut was considered to be the seat of emotion—hence the origin of the phrase ‘gut feeling.’ In that context, the more traditional emotional connotations of the roses seem worth considering.”

“You mean… the romantic ones.”

“In a word.”

Will ducked his head and rubbed at the nape of his neck. “I considered that interpretation.”

“And?”

There was tension in the air that Will couldn’t name. He frowned. “It would be a tough sell, considering the profile I’d constructed of the Ripper before. Shallow interpersonal connections, and all that. Jack doesn’t like contradictions.”

“I’m more appreciative of such things. Contradictions are a part of life—part of what make us human.”

“I get that. Trust me, I do.” Will’s lips twisted into a grimace. Because god only knows… he couldn’t morally approve of murder, but it still made something inappropriate churn deep in

his gut. And he somehow ended up wanting the Ripper to kill him, even when he didn't want to die.

"My point is that you can share any of your thoughts with me, no matter how unusual they may seem. Your mind is a great gift; it would be a shame to silence it."

He wondered if Hannibal would still think his mind was a "great gift" if he knew it was now driving Will to skewer himself with fishhooks. He didn't respond.

Hannibal flipped through the book, and Will approached. The pictures were smaller than he had expected, and it was clearly more of an academic reference than a coffee-table book.

"Since you recognized the reference, I take it you're familiar with the icon of St. Sebastian?"

"I have a basic familiarity."

Hannibal continued to flip through the pages. "It's worth noting that the original story of St. Sebastian does not have his death by arrows, but rather by bludgeoning. Yet artists throughout history have been drawn to the iconography of the man bound to a tree and shot full of arrows. And thanks in part to the saint's youth, his state of undress, and the phallic symbolism of the arrows, over the centuries the image has gained increasing degrees of eroticism and renown in gay communities. Often the expression is not one of agony, but rather ecstasy."

"There's some inherent overlap between those expressions," Will said before he could stop himself.

Hannibal looked a bit amused at that. "Indeed there is. The philosopher Georges Bataille was known to be enthralled by a photograph of a person executed by *lingchi*, the infamous 'death by a thousand cuts,' because of an expression in which he saw both torment and a state bordering on ecstasy. For him the forces of the erotic and the violent were not contradictions, but deeply connected. And that connection can certainly be seen in many paintings of St. Sebastian. Perhaps this fascinates the Ripper as well."

Will nodded slowly, absorbing the information. "A contrast of elements that are normally seen as contradictions, but instead combine to become something new. It's appropriate for the Ripper. His work isn't usually… erotic, exactly." He hoped to hell he wasn't giving himself away by blushing. "But there's beauty, aesthetic considerations alongside the violence. Surgical precision accompanied by brutalization, the 'ripping.'" He hesitated before adding, "The trapping of romantic love inside an effigy of the subject's death."

"Another key assertion of Bataille's was that the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Certainly sounds like the Ripper could have been borrowing a page from Bataille."

"He was an interesting, albeit greatly flawed philosopher."

It only took a moment longer for Hannibal to come across something of interest in the book, leaning in and smoothing the page with interest.

“This appears to be it. A work by Giovanni Antonio Galli, also known as Spadarino. He is not a particularly well-documented artist, so it’s a very small entry, bare bones. I’m afraid it won’t be very informative, but take a look, see if anything catches your attention.”

Will came in closer, and when he leaned over the book, he felt Hannibal lean in slightly as well. In the quiet of the office, he heard the distinct sound of sniffing.

“Did you just…” He turned to look at Hannibal, but the end of his question was lost. Hannibal’s eyes ran down his body appraisingly.

“Have you had an accident recently, Will? I thought I smelled a trace of blood.”

Will looked down at his hands as if they might reveal a recent papercut as the culprit, though he was painfully aware of the bandaged wound on his shoulder. Had he managed to aggravate the wound? Unless Hannibal was a bloodhound, it shouldn’t have been enough for him to notice.

“Might have nicked myself shaving this morning,” he mumbled.

Hannibal stared at his face, which surely didn’t look like he’d shaved at all recently.

Will tried to focus on the book, but although this definitely looked like the inspiration for the scene, none of the details caught his eye.

He shook his head. “You’re right, I don’t see anything that stands out.”

He tried to discretely rub at his sleeve over the wound, on the off chance something had happened and it was now bleeding through, but it was dry, and Hannibal noticed the motion.

“You’ve hurt your arm.”

“It’s just an itch. Why are you suddenly so curious about any little bumps or bruises I might have?” His words were more acrid than he intended. Hannibal was staring at him, and Will felt like a dog snarling and concealing its wound as Hannibal tread too close to a discovery. “What?”

“You’re not being honest with me, Will. I’d hoped by now you would have more trust in me, and more respect for my abilities as a psychiatrist. You’re far from the first patient to try to hide something from me, and I’m familiar with how that looks.”

He bristled. “Thought I wasn’t officially your patient anymore, Dr. Lecter. You rubber-stamped me. We’re just having conversations.”

“I have a professional obligation to offer my assistance if I believe you are at risk of harm. And there are only so many reasons for one to deliberately conceal a wound from a medical or psychiatric professional.”

The words *a danger to yourself or others* popped into Will's mind—he sure as hell wasn't going to give Hannibal anything that might actually be ethically actionable, and self-mutilation probably fell into that category.

"Are you going to accuse me of anything directly, or are you just going to go fishing in the waters of my mind and hope you find some tasty tidbit?" Before Hannibal could respond, Will shook his head. "I'm not playing games with you. I appreciate your concern, but I have other ways I'd rather spend my time."

He made a beeline toward the door, but just before he reached it, Hannibal said, "If your wound is the result of a sadomasochistic relationship, I assure you I will not be judgmental."

Will stopped in his tracks, thrown off balance by the sudden turn. "That's not—"

He cut himself short, still staring at the door as he ran a quick calculation of the different activities that might fall under "mysteriously injured and ashamed to talk about it," and realized this might be the safest conclusion for Hannibal to make under the circumstances, and it would be better to agree. But it was too late.

"If that's not what it is, I really must entreat you to explain what injury you've acquired that you feel the need to hide."

Hannibal's voice was close; he had followed Will.

"You're still assuming I *have* an injury to hide in the first place, and I really don't."

Will reached for the doorknob, but before he could open it a hand landed on his upper arm, directly over the wound, and squeezed with surprising strength. The pain hadn't been bad since the last night, but the death grip of Hannibal's fingers was enough to make him visibly flinch and curse, from surprise as much as pain.

Hannibal used his hold to turn Will around to face him. Will glared at him, furious at his blatant overreaching, but Hannibal's face didn't reflect concern—it was anger.

"You've injured yourself."

Something was wrong here, and Will's mind reeled trying to put his finger on it, but he was able to put together one last attempt at a lie. "Stupid fishing accident. Wasn't intentional, just embarrassing."

It was something about Hannibal's expression, about the anger…

Something from his fantasies last night. The speculation about the Ripper, that he might be angry at Will hurting himself before he had the chance to turn his body into art.

"You're lying to me."

Hannibal's voice was still level, but the hair at the back of Will's neck prickled. There was anger there, threat even, but someone less observant wouldn't have noticed it. Hannibal's manner was as carefully controlled as always.

As carefully controlled as Will had always imagined the Ripper would be.

As soon as the thought entered his mind, far too many pieces started to click into place at the same time, and Will found himself stuttering. “You… You’re…”

A former surgeon. Intelligent, cultured. Someone with an aesthetic sensibility. Able to blend perfectly into society. Someone with access to the cases, access to Will, and an understanding of how his mind worked.

“What, Will?”

Will could feel the pulse in his own throat; he was sure he must look like a scared rabbit, because absolutely every bone in his body felt wired and ready to sprint. It had to be obvious to Hannibal, it *had* to be. He was flashing through flight and fight and a not negligible *fuck* responses, and they all mashed together—he wanted to run, he wanted Hannibal to catch him, he wanted…

“You need to get the hell away from me,” he said, wrenching himself free and moving past Hannibal, back into the center of the room, where at least he wasn’t trapped with his back to the wall. Anything to just get enough space to breathe and think for a second.

Hannibal followed, eyes sharp and tracking his movements, stride slow. Stalking him. That took care of the last of his doubts—the man in front of him was a predator, just like the Ripper. *Exactly* like the Ripper.

“It’s clear you’re hiding something from me, Will. I just want to know why you’re being so evasive. The truth, this time.”

“You want the truth? Fine.” Will backed up against the desk, and grasped the edge tightly for balance. Broaching the fact that hung between them was terrifying, but pretending it didn’t exist was worse. And he was sure, absolutely certain, of who stood before him now.

Hannibal paused his stride. “I’m listening.”

“I did it because of the Ripper.” He couldn’t say *because of you* yet, too overwhelmed to fully shatter that thin pane of glass that lay between mutual understanding. He didn’t want to bring things to a premature end, but he didn’t want to spend days or weeks lying and acting until a full reveal; he had to push toward it.

It was impossible to read Hannibal’s face now, eyes dark and inky in shadow, but Will could see that statement land.

“Why? Was it the stress of the circumstances that led you to injure yourself?”

“No. It wasn’t like that. More like a direct extension of that scene rattling around in my mind.”

“An extension?”

Will nodded and wet his lips. “Like it was the Ripper’s hand that acted instead of my own.”

He looked very deliberately into Hannibal's eyes. So curious, so hungry.

"And what exactly was it that the Ripper's hand led you to do?"

"I took a fishhook. Left the curtains open, imagined he was watching. I wanted him to see."

"See what?" Hannibal had moved closer, so slowly that Will had barely noticed it happen. He was only an arm's length away.

"I…" It felt too exposing and rushed to bring to light the more provocative details immediately. "I pierced my arm with the hook, just like he would have if he strung me up like that victim. I wanted to know how it would feel to be the victim."

"How did it feel?"

He took a shaky breath. "It felt good. Even better if he could see exactly what I was doing and how deep he'd gotten into my head."

Hannibal hesitated while searching for an appropriately professional response, and Will smiled just a little, bracing himself. "Don't pretend it doesn't please you to hear that."

"Why would it please me?"

"Because you're the one who started it, aren't you?"

Hannibal stiffened, blinked. Will could practically see the cogs turn in his mind as he sized him up, calculating. Cautious of misinterpretation.

"Tell me what I started, Will."

"You left that body for me. You're the Ripper."

After just a moment, Hannibal's hand slid up to Will's neck, fingers curving around his throat and settling on his carotid artery. Will didn't think it was possible for his heart to leap any higher into his throat, but even without any pressure added, it was enough to make him dizzy. Hannibal's gaze was so intense that it sent a chill down his spine, and his blood rushed downward with it.

"If that were true, wouldn't it be wiser not to tell me you know?"

Will shook his head. "And pretend I don't know anything, and fake a revelation later? No. It was the anger that clued me in. You didn't like the idea of someone messing with a canvas you wanted for yourself."

There was a slight smile—pride, perhaps—but it faded quickly. "I had hoped to have more time before the chase came to its end."

A shiver ran through him. "Are you going to kill me?"

"That's certainly the safest option for me. I couldn't let you report your theory to the FBI."

“I wouldn’t turn you in,” Will said, though even after everything he was amazed to find he truly meant it.

“Why should I believe you?” His finger stroked against the rapid pulse in Will’s throat. “You’re so frightened now, even when you put on such a brave face at the thought of your death before.”

A wheeze of laughter broke from Will’s lungs. His head tilted back, exposing his throat further. “This… this isn’t fear.” At least, not entirely. He was choking on adrenaline; he could hardly blame Hannibal for misreading it.

“Oh? What would you call it, then?”

“It’s…” He faltered, staring and captivated by Hannibal’s eyes. “I’m…”

When Will’s eyes finally tore free, they flickered downward, a damning motion that confirmed the awkward tent in his pants.

Hannibal’s gaze followed his, and Will felt his face flush hot. He had to close his eyes.

Before Hannibal could comment, he said, “It wasn’t just the hook. I touched myself while I did it. Intimately. I fantasized about how you’d tear me apart. I did the night I saw the crime scene, too, I couldn’t help myself. It got me so worked up I had to pull over on the side of the road.” His words were rushing out now, a strange relief in getting them out, no matter how embarrassing the truth may be.

He grimaced, torn between grim humor and chagrin, and added, “Was this what Bataille was talking about?”

“Bataille once described physical eroticism as a violence that bordered on death or murder. For you, does that border feel permeable?”

Another huff of laughter. “Sure seems to be.” When he again managed to meet Hannibal’s eyes, he saw deep intrigue.

“Tell me how it felt to find the scene that night.”

Will bit his lip and lowered his gaze again. “It excited me, before I even set eyes on it. I hadn’t seen a Ripper scene in the flesh before, I was benched in the classroom for the last sounder. When Jack called to tell me he thought it was a new Ripper victim, he didn’t say it was for me, but I knew it was going to be beautiful. The Ripper’s work always is, it’s… art. More than any other killer I’ve ever seen.”

“You were already an admirer of my work?”

Hannibal’s thumb brushed Will’s lip, and Will couldn’t resist giving it a soft kiss. Hannibal paused for a moment before withdrawing it and tipping Will’s chin up, prompting an answer.

“I saw beauty in it. Flickers of beauty in other violence too—there’s a reason I was trying to avoid getting a psych eval. But you knew that. At least, saw some of the truth of it.”

“I suspected you were not quite such an innocent as you would have Jack Crawford believe, but failed to imagine the extent of it. Are you ever bothered by the horrors you witness?”

Will shook his head. “I like it,” he whispered. “Usually I see it from the perspective of the murderer, not the victim, but it’s blurry. I think if I tried to actually murder someone my empathy could interfere, the victim’s emotions could swallow me up—but if I’m the victim, and the only one to empathize with is the killer, and he feels pleasure…”

“Then you can achieve a symbiosis. The throes of your death to fuel a killer’s ardor, and his passion in violence to fuel your ecstasy.”

“Would you find that an acceptable exchange, doctor?”

“I find it sublime. As long as your killer is me, and not another.”

“Of course,” Will breathed. Then he smiled. “You shouldn’t tease me with the threat of my murder without telling me how you plan to do it.”

“Is that so? Do you desire something to feed your fantasies?”

Will nodded. “Would you kill me the same way as my lookalike?”

“No. He was a prelude; I will take even more time with you. Savor every moment of taking you apart and shaping your body into the most beautiful monument.”

Will couldn’t suppress a full-body shudder. “Tell me more.”

Hannibal regarded him for a moment and stroked a hand over Will’s cheek. “What do you imagine? What would you choose, if I let you decide the method?”

“I imagined it the way you left the scene, flaying me and spilling my guts. But I’d take it any way you’d have me. Stabbed, choked, torn apart. I want to know how it feels to have your entire attention on me until the moment I die.”

“You certainly have my attention now.”

“I know. And it makes me feel alive.”

“The irony.”

Will managed a smile. “The irony.” Then it fell. “The point is, whatever you do, I know you will do it exquisitely, and some part of me will be delighted by it.”

Hannibal didn’t quite smile, but his eyes did. “I appreciate your enthusiasm, but it’s a bold assertion. I can think of tortures which would make even an extreme masochist flinch.”

“Didn’t say I wouldn’t flinch, just… even if I’m in agony, I think you’ll be able to find the spark inside me that’s attuned to you and can experience that delight.”

“Then I’ll have to put your theory to the test.” He placed a hand on Will’s chest and pushed, until Will had to rest on his elbows to avoid falling flat on his back on the desk, Hannibal looming over him.

He looked up at Hannibal and gasped, “Please.” Even though he was referring to his own torture and death, he wasn’t sure he’d ever made a more desperate, whorish plea.

Hannibal leaned down, hands braced on the desk on either side of him, and for one brilliant moment Will thought he was going to kiss him, but no—Hannibal *scented* him, like he had when he noticed the smell of blood, but this time so much more intimate, and Will became self-conscious that he was sweating horribly.

“You eat well, I think,” Hannibal said, his voice so near Will’s ear that he shivered. “But perhaps not very flavorfully. You do not have the sour smell of one malnourished, but nor is your scent heavy with aromatics. That will be where I start. The diet of an animal can strongly influence its flavor, so I will keep you for a while, ensure you are well fed on perfectly seasoned meals so your meat has the most exquisite flavor.”

Will felt his stomach flip, but not unpleasantly.

“The Romans used to feed their livestock on acorns and marsala for the best flavor, but I’ve often wondered how I might improve on the recipe. Perhaps I could experiment week to week, keeping you alive and merely removing one limb at a time to test the flavor. I’d insist you join me at the table to sample the flavor, of course. Has autocannibalism ever entered into your fantasies, Will?”

He shook his head. “It will now. Tell me more.”

“Hmm. The final meal could be an immersion, perhaps drowned in Armagnac like the ill-fated ortolan. It would be an uncommon indulgence to use enough to drown and marinade a man, but if you’ve been relieved of all your limbs, perhaps not unreasonable.”

Will imagined himself *relieved of all his limbs*, just a torso and head for Hannibal to carry tucked under his arm, and he made a noise that was not quite a whimper.

“On the other hand…” Hannibal looked him squarely in the face. “A more fitting end, given your gift of intuition, might be a hole drilled into the center of your skull, a third eye of sorts.” He tapped the spot on Will’s forehead. “It’s possible to open such a hole without killing you, so I would need to go further, and simply pressing the drill deeper would be so impersonal. Given your desire for my personal attention, I’m sure you’d prefer if I took the time to press an icepick into your bared brain, or even my fingers. I don’t know how long it would take to kill you simply by twisting my fingers around in your brain, but I’m willing to give it a try to see what happens. The consequences would likely be very unpleasant for you, however, distorting your brain and all your sensory experiences until it is finally destroyed.”

Will didn’t know what he could possibly say; nothing could convey the sick degree of arousal he felt at this, how despite his reticence to have a psychiatrist fumbling around in his mind, the idea of Hannibal Lecter’s fingers probing his brain struck him as a bizarre kind of bliss.

“Anything,” he said, and meant it sincerely. “Anything for you.”

“Then I want you to prove it.”

Hannibal’s hand went again to his throat, and Will tilted up his chin, the most willingly vulnerable display he could make, even as his heart pounded and his hindbrain screamed at him *no, hide, danger—*

But if his survival instincts would try to rob him of this thrill, the beautiful weight and breadth of Hannibal’s hand on his neck, what good were they?

He tried to remain as unresisting as he could, even as his body tingled and tensed with primal fear and the firm choke quickly had Will seeing spots, distortions, darkness closing in around him. Because even if Hannibal never carried out his more elaborate plans, and this was to be Will’s end, it wasn’t one he would regret.

Chapter End Notes

I have been so bad about replying to comments this year, but I really really appreciate each one, thank you!

End Notes

If you want to check out the painting referenced, which is a hell of a lot prettier than my rendition, check here - one of those paintings of St. Sebastian where it's pretty clear the death and martyrdom themes aren't reaaally the point of the composition.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!